

Editorial

Monday, April. 16, 2018

A heady affair

While the nation, and by extension the state is getting increasingly obsessed with interpreting each and every issue and incidents with explanations tinged with religious justifications or cultural innuendoes thereby threatening to bifurcate the society on communal and religious lines, abetted in no small measure by bigoted religious fanatics albeit indirectly and with practiced subtlety, the state is slowly but unmistakably being overrun by a more insidious threat that has the potential to wipe out the entire society and its future. The menace of drugs has been an ever present menace in our society cutting across communal, cultural, economic and ethnic lines. While the state government has managed to portray a sense of reprieve from the ever present danger to the society, everyday experiences indicate otherwise.

The involvement of very influential persons in the trafficking of such psychotropic drugs in and through the state is a foregone conclusion. It is certainly beyond the reach and capacity of the common public to be dealing in such highly risky and financially intensive business, and the latest arrest of a retired senior police officer who was ironically in charge of Narcotics in the state in connection with the seizure of a large consignment of illegal narcotic substances once again drives home the point. Consignments of various banned narcotic substances worth crores have routinely been intercepted and arrests made, and a lot of those involved in these trafficking have turned out to be influential and well-connected persons and even high ranking officers of the armed forces. The lure of the personal gain and instant wealth have far outweighed the concern these narcotics would create in the society. In fact the returns on such illegal ventures is so lucrative that it has been reported that there are already improvised mobile drug manufacturing units operating in the state, a frightening revelation given the increased susceptibility of the younger generation to such forms of induced euphoria given the increasing lack of socially and physically active interactions.

The threat of drugs poisoning the society and the young generation in the state is all too real and needs immediate attention. The task, however is easier said than done, as almost everyone involved in the trafficking of such harmful substance turns out to be influential, well-connected and highly ranked officers. This may be one of the most important factor hindering the fight against drugs abuse and narcotics trafficking in the state.

So what should be done to stem the increasing menace of drugs in the state? First off - a very strict and stringent form of punishment needs to be meted out to those traffickers with no leniency whatsoever. A swift and consistent justice delivery system will also prove to be a huge deterrent for the traffickers. Involvement of the public in controlling drug trafficking and abuse as well as providing incentives in various forms will go a long way in evolving an effective system of combating the drug menace in the state and the rest of the country. The public have the ultimate power to decide the future of the state and those in power and authority should be made aware of the fact so that they carry out their duties and responsibility instead of abusing their positions and making unlawful gains out of it.

India may lose aircraft carrier edge over China

Agency
New Delhi, April 16

China is set to begin preliminary sea trials of its second aircraft carrier within a month or so, even as it steams ahead with plans to also construct mammoth nuclear-powered ones, signalling its hard-nosed intent to project military power on the high seas in the years ahead.

China's scorching pace in constructing aircraft carriers confronts India, which has been operating such sea-going airbases or "flat-tops" for over five decades now, with the very real prospect of losing its long-standing edge over

its larger neighbour in this arena. India is currently making do with just one aircraft carrier in the shape of the 44,400-tonne INS Vikramaditya, the refurbished Admiral Gorshkov inducted from Russia for \$2.33 billion in November 2013. Sources say the long-delayed 40,000-tonne indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-I) or INS Vikrant, being built at Cochin Shipyard, is likely to begin sea trials only by October 2020 now. It will become fully-operational, with its aviation complex and long-range surface-to-air missiles, only by 2023 at the earliest. Sanctioned by the government way back in January 2003, INS Vikrant will now cost Rs 19,341 crore.

Heigrujam Nabashyam Political Commentator

Meetei is one of the indigenous communities of North East India, who had its kingdom for centuries, like the Tai-Ahom and Tipra or Tripuri. And after their conversion to Hinduism, in the 18th Century, they assumed the name 'Singh' for men and 'Devi' for women and this was how Meetei became Aryan Kshetriyas- ridiculous ! This is wrong. One can embrace any religion if one so wishes, but that does not change his ethnicity. This is basic knowledge.

During the series of debates that I had with ATSUM (All Tribal Students Unions Manipur), whose objection to STDCM's (Schedule Tribe Demand Committee Manipur) demand to include the indigenous Meetei tribe in the ST list of Indian constitution, that had reached the level of fanaticism that cannot see anything beyond their own self-interests, had also raised this issue. However I had stated with full responsibility that the Meiteis are neither Aryans nor Kshetriyas, but they remain Meitei. The simple idea is you don't cease to be a Kukli or a Naga when you embrace christianity or for that matter any other religion say Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. The fact of the matter is, the Meetei are a people made of seven big families or clans— Salai Taret namely Khuman, Luwang, Mangang, Angom, Moirang, Khaba-Nganba and Sarang—Leishanthem. Here it may be pertinent to mention that in the early period ethnic

Chinese and later with the arrival of Hinduism, Hindusthanese came and assimilated into the Meitei fold and became Meitei. Such things happen in many communities because of their historical experiences.

Now, what is interesting is that some intelligent and honourable people whose intentions are obvious praise the Meitei as "a highly developed society". The fact is Meetei, including the Hindu converts still worship natural objects such as rocks, stones, trees, caves, etc. the basic elements of animism, beneath the veneer of Hindu religion. It maybe noted that during the Laiharaba ritual which is observed every year at a particular period of time the highly developed Meitei would connect themselves and associate with their creator - their God by performing certain rituals by the Maibi - a sort of a Shaman and eventually, the god would tell them what to do for their well being till the time of the next season.

The truth is, till today, the 21st century the Meitei and their God are very much in touch with. This is the way a tribal lives. However such traits and characteristics of tribalism are no more found among the Nagas and the Kukis. Now, ask any Meitei, he will tell you he has a deity at home that takes care of the family; they will also have another common deity for their clan for which the Piba - the eldest son in the patriarchal line of the clan is in charge, etc. Such is the degree of tribalism that the Meitei still live

with. The fact is, Meiteis are more tribal than the Kukis and the Nagas. As regards Meitei's talents in horse riding, it is only natural for a people with a small population of around a lakh or so in those days who control the vast land stretching from the area of the present Cachhar in the west to Burma in the east. The fact was the pony the local horse was a necessity in every household, like motorcycles in today's time, it was used for multiple purposes from transportation to that of the perennial warfare. It was also the most favourite thing for the boys. There was an old saying, "Eppa sini khanglamlabadi sagol lejarangadabani" — if I knew that father is dying I would have bought a horse. Not only boys even among girls horse riding was popular. In their leisure time the boys played riding their horses hitting rounded dry bamboo roots with long cane sticks. That was how Sagol kangjei, the progenitor of modern Polo was born in the fields of Chinglepak, the home to all of us.

Regarding Meitei's dance talent, as a matter of fact tribals love to dance and sing and thus it so happened that a Meitei dance master invented a dance form based on the folk dances and adopted the movements of the hands, fingers, legs and feet to portray the love story of Radha-Krishna of the Hindu epic. And after independence, that dance form struck the chords of the Indian dance gurus and thus the gurus ordained, that dance form to be classified as a classical dance - which is now called Rasleela. So

what's so great about it! It is also noted that the intelligent and honourable people have expressed their fear that in the event of Meitei being enlisted in the ST category, the Meitei would gobble up the lion's share in the state's job sector. Frankly, I believe the intelligent people are deliberately acting ignorant. The STDCM have clearly stated that they would agree to continue with the existing quota system, of course with new nomenclature, like the case of Nagaland where each group have their respective shares of quota within the quota. This should not be a problem, as it can be agreed upon among the stakeholders.

The truth is Meitei's concern is for its survival, where a population of a few lakhs and whose only habitat is the 700 square miles valley - the home to all of us, is being exposed to global competitions and contests. Indeed Meitei do not have any constitutional protection whatsoever in the face of the serious challenges that come with the coming of the railways and the opening of the Trans-Asian highway in a few years time.

But very unfortunately ATSUM and its associates, adopting a tone of moral righteousness, have been codemning STDCM's demand to include the Meitei in the ST list. This is wrong.

The demand to include the Meitei in the ST list is genuine. This is a question of survival of the Meitei. And given the facts, nobody should have any issue with the Meitei.

National & International News

Mecca Masjid blast case verdict today: Tracking NIA's investigation into 2007 Hyderabad explosion

Agency
Hyderabad, April 16

Eleven years after a blast at the historic Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad, a special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court is expected to pronounce its judgment in the 2007 case on Monday. The fourth additional metropolitan sessions-cum-special court for NIA cases had concluded the trial, and last week posted the case for judgment on 16 April. Nine persons were killed and 58 were injured in the blast during Friday prayers at the historic mosque in Hyderabad on 18 May, 2007. Five persons were killed in subsequent police firing near the mosque as protests broke out after the blast. The case, that has been linked with the 2007 Ajmer Sharif Dargah blast, 2008 Malegaon blasts, and the Samjhauta Express attack, has seen many twists and turns in the course of investigation in the last 10 years — from witnesses turning hostile to the lack of evidence.

After initial investigation by local police, the case was transferred to the Central Bureau Of

Investigation (CBI), which then filed a chargesheet. Subsequently, the NIA took over the case from the CBI in 2011. Between 2011 and 2013, NIA filed three supplementary chargesheets.

A total of 226 witnesses were examined during the trial and as many as 411 documents were exhibited. Eventually, 10 persons allegedly belonging to right-wing organisations were named as accused in the case.

However, only five of them — Devendra Gupta, Lokesh Sharma, Swami Aseemanand alias Naba Kumar Sarkar, Bharat Mohanlal Rateshwar alias Bharat Bhai and Rajendra Chowdhary — were arrested and faced trial in the case. In 2013, the high court in Hyderabad cancelled the bail granted by a lower court to Gupta and Sharma — former members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Two other accused — Sandeep V Dange and Ramchandra Kalsangra — are still absconding, while another accused Sunil Joshi has passed away. Investigations were underway against two other accused.

In March 2017, Aseemanand, who

is also known as Jatin Chatterjee, was granted bail in the 2007 Mecca Masjid bomb blast case. Earlier associated with the RSS, the Right wing leader is considered an ideologue of the Abhinav Bharat — a fringe-group linked to other similar attacks targeting minority groups. Aseemanand was an accused even in the 2007 Samjhauta Express attack and the Ajmer the same year — cases that also included other senior right-wing leaders as suspects. However, he was acquitted in the Ajmer Shareef Dargah blast case, having been given the "benefit of doubt" after several witnesses turned hostile.

As a report in *The Times of India* points out, key witnesses have retracted their statements against the RSS functionaries in the Mecca Masjid blast case. The witnesses had earlier said that the accused had used their mobile phones to contact each other before and after the blasts to avoid the phone calls being traced back to them.

In September 2013, Hyderabad High Court set aside the compensation paid to Muslim youths wrongly arrested in the Mecca Masjid blast

case, an order that the state government protested against. On a public interest litigation, a division bench of the high court headed by Chief Justice Kalyan Jyothi Sengupta struck down a government order and directed it to recover the money already paid. It ruled that mere acquittal or discharge from a criminal case can't be basis for payment of such compensation.

The state government in January 2013 had paid Rs three lakh each to 20 people and Rs 20,000 each to 50 people. This was the first time in the country that the government paid compensation to people wrongly arrested and tortured on charges of terrorism. A fact-finding panel of the state minority commission found that police kept the youth in illegal confinement and tortured them.

Security has been heightened in Hyderabad in anticipation of the court verdict on Monday. Top officials of the city's police held a meeting and asked all zonal officials to make adequate security arrangements at all sensitive places to prevent any trouble, *Deccan Chronicle* reported.

Bangladesh rejects Myanmar's claim of repatriating Rohingya

Agency
Dhaka, Apr 16

Bangladesh today rejected a claim by Myanmar that the Buddhist-majority nation had repatriated the first five among some 700,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees who fled to the neighbouring country to escape military-led violence against the minority group.

A Myanmar government statement said on Saturday that five members of a family had returned to western Rakhine state from the border area. It said the family was staying temporarily with relatives in Maungdaw town, the administrative centre close to the border. The statement said authorities determined whether they had lived in

Myanmar and provided them with a national verification card. The card is a form of ID, but does not mean citizenship - something Rohingya have been denied in Myanmar, where they've faced persecution for decades.

The statement did not say whether any more repatriations were being planned. Bangladesh has given Myanmar a list of more than 8,000 refugees to begin the repatriations, but there have been delays due to a complicated verification process.

Bangladesh's Home Minister, Asaduzzaman Khan, today said Myanmar's claim that the family had been "repatriated" was false, noting that the family had never reached Bangladeshi territory. Khan said Myanmar's move was

"nothing but a farce." "I hope Myanmar will take all the Rohingya families back within the shortest possible time," he said.

Bangladesh's refugee, relief and repatriation commissioner, Abul Kalam, said the Rohingya family involved had never crossed the border.

"By no definition can this be called repatriation. No repatriation has taken place," he said by phone from Cox's Bazar. "Bangladesh is no way part of it." Cox's Bazar is a district in Bangladesh where camps have been set up to shelter the Rohingya. Asif Munier, an independent refugee expert who had handled the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh for years as part of the United Nations, said Myanmar's claim was a public relations stunt.

"They are doing it again and again," he said. "Bangladesh's government and the international community must ask Myanmar for an explanation for this move. While there is a bilateral process going on and international agencies are involved, such a move by Myanmar is again very unfortunate and unexpected."

Myanmar's security forces have been accused of rape, killing, torture and the burning of the homes of Rohingya villagers after insurgents attacked about 30 police outposts on August 25.

The United Nations and the United States have described the army crackdown as "ethnic cleansing." About 700,000 Rohingya Muslims flooded into neighbouring Bangladesh to escape the violence.

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